Split Second Worksheet

1. Describe the *stasis* in the play: where, when, who, what, etc. in a paragraph.

In present day Manhattan, Val Johnson is a black police officer and Vietnam vet. His father, Rusty, was a police officer in Pittsburg. On the fourth of July, Val arrests a white man, William Willis, in a dark alley while he is attempting to steal a car. After he cuffs Willis, Willis begins making very offensive racist remarks toward Val, and Val shoots and kills him.

2. What is the *intrusion*?

With no witnesses to see the murder, Val decides to take the cuffs off of Willis and plant Willis’s knife back in his hand. Val then plans to claim that Willis attacking him with the knife is the reason why he shot him.

3. What is the *unique factor*?

Rusty wants Val to be accountable for his actions and tell the truth. Alea, Val’s wife, wants him to continue with the lie so that they can move on as a family.

4. What is the *dramatic question* that should be answered by the end of the play?

Will Val tell the truth or cover up his killing of Willis?

5. Provide an illustration of the *two kinds of exposition* that the play has in it.

Only Val and the reader know of the exact nature of the crime, until he eventually admits it to Alea and Rusty.

Information about Val’s involvement in Vietnam, the structure of his family, and Rusty’s career as a police officer is provided through open dialogue among the different characters.

6. Identify the most *theatrical moment* in the play and of what importance it seems to be.

The most theatrical moment of the play is at the very end, when Val decides to lie about the murder. This moment is particularly moving because once he summons the courage to look up and tell the lie, “the life seems to have gone out of him”. This signifies that Val chose to do what he did not think was morally right.

7. List some of the *themes* of the play.

Racism (when is it ok to retaliate/how much force is ok?)

Son living up to his father’s expectations

Mixing work with family (choosing one over the other)

When is lying ok?

8. What do the principal characters *want* and what are some *obstacles* that stand in the way of them getting what they want?

Val wants a good life for his family, but his conscience tells him that he should tell the truth.

Alea wants a good life for the family, but Rusty pressures Val to tell the truth because it is his duty as a police officer

9. Describe some possible *images* in the play and how does the *title* help us understand the play.

The nature of the killing in this play happened in a *Split Second.* Val has faced racism his whole life and the words of Willis struck a nerve, causing Val to snap at a moments notice.

10. Briefly define the *family relationships* that are examined in the play.

Father and Son- Val and Rusty

Husband and Wife- Val and Alea